Monson family celebrates home preservation with sense of humor

In September 2021, Purple Heart Homes, a veterans services agency that focuses on housing solutions, asked Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH), a nonprofit and nongovernmental organization, if it would like to partner on a home preservation project. Peter, a retired Army National Guard staff sergeant and his wife, Beth, purchased a duplex in Monson three years ago. They live in one unit. Beth’s daughter and young son live in the other residence. Both spaces needed repair.

GSHFH’s Home Preservation program provides affordable micro-loans to qualifying homeowners who need help with accessibility modifications, home weatherization, general home repairs, yard cleanup, and landscaping. Greater Springfield Habitat sent staff to assess the three areas of concern – a moss-spotted roof, broken water heater in the daughter’s unit, and damaged exterior doors at both dwellings.

“We are always happy to collaborate with Purple Heart Homes to improve the living conditions for a local family,” said Deborah O’Mara, Family Services manager. “By teaming up, we
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can do much more than either organization could ever do alone. When we are finished, the family will have a fully functional and weather-tight home in which to live.”

Matt Stevenson, director of PHH Veteran Home Opportunity Program, agreed. “For Purple Heart Homes, our partnership with GSHFH for Peter’s home remodel/repair project is a significant force multiplier for our organization. This collaboration bridges both our organizations’ strengths, and together, we’re able to assist more veterans in our communities,” Matt said. “This is the second veteran project PHH has completed with Greater Springfield Habitat, and we look forward to a continued partnership in the future.”

The roof, siding, and water heater issues were addressed in December. The moss-spotted roof had several bowed shingles that began to lift. If left untreated, the roof would need to be replaced in three years. While replacement will be necessary down the line, a pressure wash took care of the immediate concern. West Springfield’s Clean Machine Power Wash performed the work and also power washed the siding and porches. A Proline 40-gallon water heater replaced the broken appliance.

“My house was looking like the ‘Amityville Horror’ house but now it sparkles like Disneyland,” Peter said. “The moss on the roof, GONE! The mossy steps in the front, GONE! An excellent job worthy of praise and kudos.”

Exterior doors for side entrances and the basement are on order. Previous doors weren’t correctly sealed and allowed drafts and a hollow interior door had been used as an exterior door.

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I found that people who choose to volunteer or work for Habitat tend to be very nice folks. That was one of the main things that’s kept me coming back. I think that kids who grow up in a family-owned home learn better, they have a place to concentrate, study, or read for pleasure. They don’t change schools as much, they see gardens and trees grow, and it makes them think about the future. I feel good about making a small contribution towards this.

What’s the funniest name you can think of for a pet? Sock puppeteer and ventriloquist Shari Lewis had a “pet” lamb called lamb chop. I didn’t get the joke when I was a little kid eagerly waiting for her TV show to start, but I think it’s funny now. Also, I’m pretty sure my dog thinks his name is “Walk” because he always pays attention when I say that.

If you could win an Olympic medal for any sport - real or fake - what would it be? Jeopardy.

Do you put cereal in the bowl before milk or milk in the bowl before cereal? Cereal first so I can gauge how much milk is needed as the level rises around the cereal.

Which actor/actress was your childhood crush? As a little kid I had a crush on Annette Funicello on the original Mickey Mouse Club. As an older kid I liked Sally Field on “The Flying Nun.” I still admire Sally Field.

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How long have you been a GSHFH volunteer? The first time I volunteered was on the duplex house on Quincy street about 11 years ago. I’ve been volunteering much more often since retiring in 2015.

Why did you become a volunteer? I was aware of Jimmy Carter’s role as a volunteer and I had long thought that I would like to try it. My wife, Anne, and I have done many do-it-yourself projects together as homeowners over the years so I thought it would be something I could do. I did like it. I’ve done other things besides construction, including Christmas gift wrapping, event planning, and serving on the Family Services committee.

What attracted you to the role and what do you hope to accomplish in this capacity?

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